

M: 12-42-34
Spencer Family Cemetery
Big Woods Community
Private

19th century

This small, attractive family cemetery consisted of a dozen or more wooden grave markers surrounded by a rail fence. The markers are wide, uninscribed planks, rounded at the tops, and stepped at the side. They mark the burying ground of an antebellum free Black family of landowners that founded the Black community that after the Civil War grew to become the Big Woods community. The site is no longer maintained and is wooded, yet it is of special significance since this is one of the very few cemeteries of antebellum free Blacks to have survived in Maryland.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

M: 12-42-34

Magi #

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

1 NAME

HISTORIC

The Spencer Family Cemetery

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

East side of Big Woods Rd.

CITY, TOWN

Dickerson

x VICINITY OF (Big Woods)

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

3

STATE

Md.

COUNTY

Montgomery

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT

☐ BUILDING(S)

☐ STRUCTURE

☒ SITE

☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☐ PUBLIC

☒ PRIVATE

☐ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS

☐ BEING CONSIDERED

No

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED

☐ UNOCCUPIED

☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☒ YES, RESTRICTED

☐ YES, UNRESTRICTED

☐ NO

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE

☐ COMMERCIAL

☐ EDUCATIONAL

☐ ENTERTAINMENT

☐ GOVERNMENT

☐ INDUSTRIAL

☐ MILITARY

☐ MUSEUM

☐ PARK

☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

☐ RELIGIOUS

☐ SCIENTIFIC

☐ TRANSPORTATION

☒ OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Esther Chapman

Cemetery

Telephone #: Not listed

STREET & NUMBER

8828 Sterling Rd.

CITY, TOWN

Landowner Landover

☐ VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code

Md.

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Registry of Deeds

Liber #: 2392/305

Folio #:

STREET & NUMBER

County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Rockville

STATE

Md.

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

M:12-42-34

CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT
☐ GOOD
☐ FAIR

☒ DETERIORATED
☐ RUINS
☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED
☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

This small cemetery is on the west side of the old Big Woods road that crossed east-west from the Beallsville Rd. to the sharp curve in new Big Woods Road to Dickerson. According to community tradition, this cemetery was the burying ground for the Spencer community.

The site is no longer maintained and ^{have} trees grown up around it. The cemetery itself was surrounded by a rail fence, portions of which remain to show the original boundaries. The grave markers are wooden and are not inscribed. They are sawn planks, about an inch and a half thick, and about two to three feet in height. Some remain upright, and may be seen in the photograph. All the markers are similar. The tops of the planks were rounded and stepped at the sides to give the appearance of a gravestone.

Though these grave markers are not inscribed or decorated with carvings, their straight forward form is quite attractive.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

| PERIOD | | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW | | | |
|---|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING | <input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION | <input type="checkbox"/> LAW | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS | <input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE | <input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> ART | <input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1900- | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY | <input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION | | | |

Black History

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

According to community tradition, this cemetery was the burying ground for the Spencer family, and the deed confirms this tradition. In fact, this property was the first tract to have been purchased by a Black family in the Big Woods community. Thus, this site marks the beginning point.

Deed R/217 shows that James Spencer, "formerly servant of Thomas Morton of Montgomery County", received a tract of fifty acres in 1814 from James Morton. James Morton was the "devisee of Thomas Morton" (perhaps his son). According to the deed, Spencer had acquired the land from Thomas Morton in 1813, but Morton did not record the deed "within the time prescribed by law". Upon Morton's death, his devisee then carried out Morton's wish and conveyed the land to Spencer.

Identified as a "former servant" it is most likely that James Spencer had been a slave of the Thomas Morton and was freed by him since "servant" is often used in legal documents in reference to slaves. Upon his manumission, Morton sold to him this tract of fifty acres. Research of the manumission papers in the Hall of Records should be undertaken by future researchers to confirm this. Also, James Spencer should appear in the antebellum censuses of freed Blacks, and that source should be consulted.

The primary importance of this site is that it establishes the Big Woods community as having its roots in a community of antebellum free Blacks. The first of these was the Spencer family in 1814, whose descendants remain in the community. The second family, located in this survey, was the Awkard family, who purchased land here in 1847. Although none of the Spencer homes remain, this burying ground has survived up to the present day and efforts should be made for the protection and preservation of these rare, lovely, and historically important wooden grave markers.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Land Records, Montgomery County Courthouse, Rockville, Md., Deed: 2392/305 R/217
 Oral interviews, not taped, with Florence and Ida Hallman and Fred and
 Jane Stearns, Big Woods community, July-September, Nov. 1978.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE

COUNTY

STATE

COUNTY

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

George W. McDaniel, Surveyor

Wesley Stubbs, Research Assistant

ORGANIZATION

Sugarloaf Regional Trails

DATE

Jan. 1979

STREET & NUMBER

Box 87

TELEPHONE

926-4510

CITY OR TOWN

Dickerson

STATE

Maryland 20753

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature, to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 Supplement.

The Survey and Inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

RETURN TO:

~~Maryland Historical Trust
 The Shaw House, 1 State Circle
 Annapolis, Maryland 21401
 (301) 267-1438~~

SUGARLOAF REGIONAL TRAILS

Box 87, Stronghold
 Dickerson, Md. 20753
 (301) 926-4510



Spencer Family Cemetery

Big Woods Community

m - 12 - 42 - 34

phot by Anne Lewis

1/79



L-R - Idella Craven, Walter
Craven, and Paul Wilson at
Spencer family cemetery

M-12-42-9¹⁶ and

M-12-42-34

Bif Woods

photo by George McDonald

8/79